



YOUTH GANGS

Addressing Youth Involvement in Gangs

What exactly is a gang?

Gangs can be defined as: visible, hardcore groups that come together for profit-driven criminal activity and severe violence. They identify themselves through the adoption of a name, common brands/colours of clothing, and tattoos to demonstrate gang membership to rival gangs.

Street gangs are not part of larger criminal organizations and often have a geographic 'turf' (often specific social housing projects and/or areas they claim to be their own for drug distribution) that they protect from rival gangs.

Youth and adults carry out planned and profitable crimes and gratuitous violence against rival gangs. Ethnic and racial composition of gangs is an important defining feature.

How Are B.C. Youth Involved?

B.C. Youth can be categorized on a continuum of gang involvement into one of the following groups:

- Spontaneous criminal activity
- Purposeful criminal
- Street gang
- Criminal business organization

Youth Gangs in B.C.

It is important to understand that almost all youth gang members in B.C. belong to street gangs, where the membership is fluid, there is a lack of organization and structure, the composition is multi-ethnic, and youth frequently come together for a series of criminal events.

Younger members are most likely to be involved in the most serious crimes of violence, as they are in the process of being recruited into the street gang. These youth want to prove themselves and rise through the ranks; they often earn serious money for gangs.

Youth are Classified into a Gang Role

- Wanna-bes/posers (these individuals belong to spontaneous criminal activity groups or purposeful criminal groups)
- Recruits (into street gangs)
- Associates
- Leaders of street gangs

Adults are much more likely to belong to higher-level criminal organizations with hierarchical structures, whereas youth are mainly engaged in loosely organized groups which have cellular structures and fluid membership.

This Tip Sheet Generously Sponsored by:

Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General



www.bccpa.org



Facts on Youth Gangs

There are many myths perpetuated by the media and the general public which contribute to a social panic about youth gangs. In reality, the vast majority of B.C. youth are healthy, contributing members of society; less than 0.5% belong to gangs.

It is important to understand that most gangs in Canada are adult, not youth gangs. The large majority of youth who are mistakenly classified as 'gang members' are instead involved in anti-social behaviors which, although serious, nonetheless are not gang-related. Quality anti-gang strategies therefore must address those negative stereotypes.

Preventing Youth Gangs

It is less costly and more effective to prevent youth from joining gangs than it is to support a member to exit a gang (Greenwood, 2006). The programs which have the best outcomes are those which combine primary, secondary and tertiary prevention in a multi-disciplinary and multi-systemic community approach.

Information in this Tip Sheet adapted from Totten, M. (2007) *Promising Practices for Addressing Youth Involvement in Gangs* Report to British Columbia Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, Preventing Youth Gang Violence in BC – A Comprehensive and Coordinated Provincial Action Plan.

This Tip Sheet Generously Sponsored by:

**Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General**

Elements of Youth Gang Prevention

Primary prevention focuses on the entire child and youth population at risk and the biological, personal, social, and environmental risk factors linked to criminal behaviour.

Secondary prevention services target individuals and groups identified as being at greater risk of becoming gang members.

Tertiary prevention targets gang members and recruits directly to rehabilitate or incapacitate youth, address the needs of victims, and provide exit strategies and support to leave and remain out of gangs.

For more information on Youth Gang Violence in B.C. please contact

Jamie Lipp

A/Director, Crime Prevention & Stakeholder Relations Unit
Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General

Telephone: 604 660-2916

E-mail: Jamie.Lipp@gov.bc.ca

For additional youth gang resources contact:

BC Crime Prevention Association

Telephone: 604 291-9959

Email: info@bccpa.org



www.bccpa.org